

ABSENCE OUTSIDE THE U.S. FOR MORE THAN FIVE MONTHS

What happens to my F-1 status if I am outside of the U.S. for more than five months?

If you leave the U.S. for more than five months and are not pursuing a study abroad experience, you must begin a new period of F-1 status with a new I-20 and new F-1 visa stamp in your passport upon your return to the U.S. The impact of leaving the U.S. for 5 months or more is that:

- You must pay the SEVIS fee of \$100 by filing Form I-901 and submitting payment. See the ISSO handout entitled, "Paying the SEVIS Fee and Filing Form I-901."
- You must continue in valid F-1 status for at least one academic year again before re-establishing eligibility for any type of off-campus work authorization, including optional practical training. If you are near the end of your degree program at T.U., be sure to discuss the implications of an extended stay outside the U.S. with an ISSO advisor.

However, if your absence was for an officially accepted Towson University study abroad experience, your time outside the U.S. will not impact your F-1 status in this way. You will be able to claim your previous time in enrolled status in the U.S. toward the eligibility requirement for off-campus employment options and you will not need to pay the SEVIS fee.

What steps do I have to take to return to Towson University?

In order to legally re-enter the U.S. you must complete the following steps:

1. If you were not enrolled for the prior semester, you will need to request re-enrollment at the university. You must obtain a Request for Re-Enrollment from the Re-admission Office at Enrollment Services Building, room 220 (telephone: 410.704.2007). The Request for Re-Enrollment is also available online at: <http://onestop.towson.edu/readmission.asp>. (If you have been studying abroad through the arrangements of Towson University's Study Abroad Office, then you have been enrolled and do not need to complete this step.)
2. Contact the International Student and Scholar Office (ISSO) to let us know when you are planning to return to the U.S. Inform us of your foreign address and an address where you would like your new Form I-20 sent, if different. Also give us your e-mail address if you have access to the Internet.
3. For the ISSO to issue a new Form I-20, your financial ability documents must be less than 12 months old. Most likely, you will need to submit new documentation, so ask the ISSO for the current required amount (official estimated academic and living expenses) and for samples of acceptable document format. Confirm that your passport and visa are both valid. If they have expired you will need to get them renewed. (You will need your new Form I-20 for an F-1 visa renewal.)
4. Obtain a new visa at a U.S. consulate in your home country. Even though the face of your I-20 may appear to be valid, your visa is subject to cancellation and should not be used because you could risk being turned back from the U.S. and sent home by US Customs & Border Protection. Please see the ISSO handout "Understanding Your Visa" for further information.
5. Make sure you have your passport, your new Form I-20, and SEVIS fee receipt (if applicable) accessible in your carry-on luggage when you travel to the U.S. Also have all of your previous Form I-20's, your financial documentation, and a T.U. transcript or grade report accessible, as the United States Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) officers usually inspect all of these documents when processing a new Form I-20.
6. When being processed by USCBP at the U.S. Port of Entry, make sure the officer stamps a new I-94 card and your new Form I-20 with your entry date and makes the notation "F-1, D/S" then returns the I-94 card and your Form I-20 to you.
7. Come to the ISSO upon return to Towson University. Bring your new I-20 and I-94 card so that we can confirm your legal status and update your immigration file.